

## THE MONTANIAN

Libby MT 59923

Wednesday

FEB 23 2005

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# 40 Baucus urging nation's top health official to help Libby

*Senator will report back to Libby personally on Feb. 24*

U.S. Senator Max Baucus, D-Mont., will be in Libby this Thursday to discuss the town's asbestos-related healthcare issues at a public meeting. The public is invited to attend at 1:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 24, at Libby City Council chambers at City Hall, 952 E. Spruce St.

Baucus will report on a meeting he held Feb. 16 in Washington with the nation's top healthcare official. At that meeting Baucus told Mike Leavitt, the former EPA administrator and new Secretary for the Department of Health and Human Services, that more must be done to help people in Libby afford healthcare after being exposed to deadly tremolite asbestos fibers by W.R. Grace & Co.

Baucus told Leavitt that affording quality healthcare in Libby remains one of the biggest hurdles the town is working to overcome following years of exposure to tremolite asbestos by the defunct W.R. Grace vermiculite mine that operated in Libby until 1990.

Baucus also took the opportunity to enlist Leavitt's support behind establishing a new research center in Libby and Missoula that will help develop long-term solutions for treating people with asbestosis and other asbestos-related



**Senator Max Baucus**

diseases.

At a hearing of the Senate Finance Committee, Baucus thanked Leavitt for visiting Libby last year as EPA administrator.

"They appreciate it, and so do I," said Baucus, the highest-ranking Democrat on the panel. "But as you know, Libby still faces some serious health issues. I hope you will work with me to improve upon what we've already achieved in Libby."

Baucus said health care ranks as one of the most pressing issues facing Libby residents.

"People are sick and getting sicker. They are dying up there," he said, noting he is also helping to advance asbestos cleanup and pro-



**Leavitt**

mote economic development. Since news reports first made public the situation in Libby in November, 1999, Baucus has helped secure millions of federal dollars for cleanup,

health care and economic development. He was the first high-ranking elected official to visit Libby after the asbestos situation became public, and he has since been there personally more than 15 times.

Baucus said he also wants to direct more federal resources to the Center for Asbestos Related Diseases in Libby, which he helped establish in 2000.

"The CARD clinic has done a tremendous job providing health care and screening for Libby residents, but additional federal dollars will help provide more and better care," Baucus said.

"I want to keep the momentum we have going in Libby," Baucus said. "We can and must do more to help Libby residents get the health care they need and deserve. They didn't ask for this lot. They've been through enough."